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SUBJECT: CDU NRW MINISTER PRESIDENT RUETTIGERS PLEASED WITH US VISIT

REF: DUESSELDORF 0004

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11. (SBU) Summary: North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) Minister-President Juergen Ruetters told the CG his recent visit was "very successful." His second trip in 12 months, he signed an agreement on energy and environmental cooperation with Pennsylvania. He was pleased with his meetings with Senators Lugar, Coleman, Hagel, with White House Environment Advisor Connaughton (they met twice) and with the Deputy Secretaries of Energy, Treasury and Commerce. In NY, he had another long conversation with Henry Kissinger and visited the NYSE, where he gained a better understanding of the nuance of equity capital firms' roles in international markets. Ruetters delivered a foreign policy speech in Washington that was significantly different from a controversial one he delivered in Berlin in late January, which aides since revised to stress positive themes of Atlantic partnership. End Summary.

Second U.S. Trip

12. (SBU) Almost exactly a year after his first trip to the U.S. as Minister-President, Ruetters paid a second official visit February 12-17 to Washington, Pittsburgh and New York. He was joined by Michael Breuer, Minister for Federal and European Affairs and 35 others, including reps from NRW small and medium-sized businesses in the energy and environment technology areas and 11 print and TV journalists. The visit received extensive media coverage in NRW and Germany-wide, which a business rep suggested to CG is indicative of the Minister-President's ambitions.

Focus: Energy and Environment

13. (U) Despite an ice and snow storm in the DC area that resulted in a nine hour flight delay and the cancellation of several events, Ruetters considered his trip "very successful," as he told the CG on February 23. He was particularly pleased to sign a cooperation agreement with Pennsylvania on renewable energy and environmental protection issues with Governor Ed Rendell. Representatives of two companies based in NRW and Pennsylvania signed contracts on the construction of a U.S. plant to transform "waste coal" into diesel fuel. A senior aide observed that contracts like this usually "only happen on trips to China." In addition to visiting the U.S. headquarters of Bayer Corporation, Ruetters also visited the Washington offices of 3M, UPS, and Citigroup (which together employ almost 10,000 people in NRW), thus raising his appreciation for the major role U.S. business plays in the NRW economy.

14. (U) Ruetters promoted heavily the themes of NRW as the

"energy capital of Germany," if not Europe, and its energy efficiency technology and experience. He was very pleased that White House Environment Advisor Jim Connaughton met with him and participated in a second event, which he interpreted as evidence of senior USG interest in closer cooperation. He was also pleased to have met with the Deputy Secretaries of Treasury, Energy and Commerce, and with Senators Lugar, Coleman and Hagel and Congressman Delahunt (D-MA), who reportedly may visit Germany in April to discuss energy issues, inter alia. According to an aide, Ruettggers' meeting with Henry Kissinger in New York went very well, as did his visit to the NYSE, which increased his knowledge of capital markets and gave him a greater appreciation also of the positive role private equity firms and hedge funds can play, both of which have been controversial in German society.

Revised Foreign Policy Speech

15. (SBU) At a Konrad Adenauer Foundation event on February 13, Ruettggers delivered a significantly revised version of his controversial January 29 DGAP (German Council on Foreign Relations) speech on foreign policy, which removed language that had caused critical press commentary in the German national media. A senior aide who accompanied Ruettggers told CG the January speech had been drafted largely by a friend outside government, and was not widely cleared in the NRW government. Senior Ruettggers advisors, led by State Secretary Michael Mertes, rewrote the text, dropping language on Islamic terrorism interpreted by some to be ambivalent about its roots, replacing it with points on energy security (calling for a common European energy policy and criticizing Russia for using energy as a political weapon), emphasizing that a strong and united Europe is in the U.S. interest and should not be a counterforce, and calling for the need to write a new chapter in the friendship between Europe and the U.S. in tackling international problems.

Comment

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16. (SBU) The Ruettggers trip reflected the personal importance he places on expanding ties with the U.S. He clearly sees concrete benefits for NRW business in the energy and climate area and has instructed his ministers to look for ways to translate the progress of the last 12 months into more results. The visit laid further groundwork for more visits this year focusing on energy and education, including by Science Minister Andreas Pinkwart and Parliamentary Speaker Regina van Dinter. Ruettggers also recognizes that better knowledge of the U.S. is necessary if he wants to pursue politics at the national level. His utterances on foreign policy and relations with the U.S., as reflected in his revised speech, were more positive than those in January, suggesting that he has also gained more appreciation for nuance in the US-Europe dialogue.

17. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.
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